

Harriet Tubman is perhaps the most well-known of all the Underground Railroad's "conductors." During a ten-year span she made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom. And, as she once proudly pointed out to Frederick Douglass, in all of her journeys she "never lost a single passenger."

Tubman was born a slave in Maryland's Dorchester County around 1820. At age five or six, she began to work as a house servant. Seven years later she was sent to work in the fields. While she was still in her early teens, she suffered an injury that would follow her for the rest of her life. Always ready to stand up for someone else, Tubman blocked a doorway to protect another field hand from an angry overseer. The overseer picked up and threw a two-pound weight at the field hand. It fell short, striking Tubman on the head. She never fully recovered from the blow, which subjected her to spells in which she would fall into a deep sleep.



Around 1844 she married a free black named John Tubman and took his last name. (She was born Araminta Ross; she later changed her first name to Harriet, after her mother.) In 1849, in fear that she, along with the other slaves on the plantation, was to be sold, Tubman resolved to run away. She set out one night on foot. With some assistance from a friendly white woman, Tubman was on her way. She followed the North Star by night, making her way to Pennsylvania and soon after to Philadelphia, where she found work and saved her money. The following year she returned to Maryland and escorted her sister and her sister's two children to freedom. She made the dangerous trip back to the South soon after to rescue her brother and two other men. On her third return, she went after her husband, only to find he had taken another wife. Undeterred, she found other slaves seeking freedom and escorted them to the North.

Tubman returned to the South again and again. She devised clever techniques that helped make her "forays" successful, including using the master's horse and buggy for the first leg of the journey; leaving on a Saturday night, since runaway notices couldn't be placed in newspapers until Monday morning; turning about and heading south if she encountered possible slave hunters; and carrying a drug to use on a baby if its crying might put the fugitives in danger. Tubman even carried a gun which she used to threaten the fugitives if they became too tired or decided to turn back, telling them, "You'll be free or die."

By 1856, Tubman's capture would have brought a \$40,000 reward from the South. On one occasion, she overheard some men reading her wanted poster, which stated that she was illiterate. She promptly pulled out a book and feigned reading it. The ploy was enough to fool the men.

Tubman had made the perilous trip to slave country 19 times by 1860, including one especially challenging journey in which she rescued her 70-year-old parents. Of the famed heroine, who became known as "Moses," Frederick Douglass said, "Excepting John Brown -- of sacred memory -- I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than [Harriet Tubman]."

And John Brown, who conferred with "General Tubman" about his plans to raid Harpers Ferry, once said that she was "one of the bravest persons on this continent."

Becoming friends with the leading abolitionists of the day, Tubman took part in antislavery meetings. On the way to such a meeting in Boston in 1860, in an incident in Troy, New York, she helped a fugitive slave who had been captured.

During the Civil War Harriet Tubman worked for the Union as a cook, a nurse, and even a spy. After the war she settled in Auburn, New York, where she would spend the rest of her long life. She died in 1913.

Image Credit: Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

The Harriet Tubman Home
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The Harriet Tubman Home preserves the legacy of "The Moses of Her People" in the place where she lived and died in freedom. The site is located on 26 acres of land in Auburn, New York, and is owned and operated by the [AME Zion Church](#). It includes four buildings, two of which were used by Harriet Tubman.

[African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Auburn](#)
[Harriet Tubman Life](#)
[Harriet Tubman Resources](#)

History of the Harriet Tubman Home

In 1857, Harriet Tubman relocated her parents from St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada to Auburn, NY. She was provided a two story brick home [photo] on the outskirts of Auburn, by her friend, William H. Seward. A short time later he sold the property to Tubman for a modest sum, an illegal transaction at the time. Seward was at that time the US Senator from New York.

In 1863, Tubman led a group of African American Union soldiers on raids along the Comcahee River in South Carolina. There she met a soldier named Nelson Davis. They were married in Auburn in 1869, with the Swards among the many friends in attendance. Davis and Tubman lived in a brick house on the property until his death in 1888. That house is now used as home for the Resident Manager of the Harriet Tubman Home.

In 1896, Tubman purchased at auction the 25 acre parcel on which the Home stands, for \$1450. At this time she was receiving a \$20 monthly pension that had been awarded to her by the Congress. Unable to raise sufficient funds on her own, she deeded the property to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1903. In 1908, the Harriet Tubman Home was opened, in the frame structure that still stands [\[photo\]](#), and the original brick home, which has since been demolished. Throughout her remaining life, from 12 to 15 persons were housed there.

After Tubman's death the home continued to operate for a few years, and was then closed. The existing frame building was vacant from 1928 until it was ordered demolished by the city in 1944 [\[photo\]](#). Bishop William J. Walls of the AME Zion church organized a fund drive, which raised \$30,000 for restoration of the Home. The restored Home was dedicated on April 13, 1953 as a memorial to Tubman's life and work, under the auspices of the AME Zion church.

How You Can Help

The Harriet Tubman Home receives no outside funding, and relies on contributions from persons and organizations that support its mission. Volunteer opportunities exist for persons able to contribute to the Home's many programs. Financial contributions are needed to support the cost of adding to the home's library, and to its collection of materials related to Harriet Tubman and her life. Because the Home was abandoned for an extended period prior to its restoration in 1953, original artifacts associated with Harriet Tubman are particularly desired.

Persons able to contribute to the work of the home can make arrangements for volunteering or for tax-deductible contributions by [contacting the Resident Manager](#).